

*Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Stotram*¹

INTRODUCTION

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Who is a normal person? Who is to decide that this is a normal or abnormal human being? Human beings have to decide what it takes to be a normal person. It is relative. Assume that in a given society all are abnormal from the standpoint of a different society. People in that society would never know that they are not normal. Therefore it is normal to be abnormal. So if it is normal to be abnormal then you are normal. Who is to decide?

Suppose from another planet where people are, let us say, aware of what Vedanta talks about, one fellow comes here. What will he think about us? This normal person will say we are all crazy. Let us look at what the Vedic *Rishis* think about us. Different people think about us differently. Someone thinks we are born of sin and some think of us as a bunch of particles. But the Vedic seers don't say that we are normal or abnormal. They don't make any judgment. They tell us, acknowledging a certain self-identity confusion as a universal fact, that the self as it is construed is not true. What you think about your self is not true and what is true about you is exactly what you would like to be – universally. Self-confusion is universal on this planet.

The *Rishis* have a drastically opposite vision of what one thinks about one's self. What they say is something I have no choice to know or not know. Because what I want to be is exactly what I am. I want to be free from being small, to be without any form of limitation, unhappiness, fear and so on. If I

had a choice before knowing what they said, I now lose all my choices. In fact the more you come to know, the fewer are the choices. The ignorant have more choices. So we lose choice now. I need to know.

What the *Rishis* say about you is just the opposite of what you think you are. It seems to be sane to think that you are as good as your body, mind, and senses. There is nothing abnormal about it. This body and mind have their limitations, therefore your emotions are not going to be very positive. There will be fear, disappointment, a sense of failure, rejection, etc. All this will be your lot and what you are not will be vast. Even if you have not seen the world, it is vast for you. So what you are not is always more than what you are. It is humbling to know that you have no say over a lot of things. In the universe this earth is not even a pinhead. A pinhead is a size that you can see, but in the map of the universe the earth will not be visible. So that you are small and insignificant is not any strange abnormal feeling. It is sane and objective. It is normal to feel insecure, frightened, unhappy, etc. Everything is normal. It is normal until you come across a *Rishi*.

The *Rishi* has a version of you that is just the opposite. He doesn't say that your body is limitless or the mind and senses that you talk about as small and insignificant. The *Rishi* doesn't alter that at all; he confirms that. He says that the body is time-bound,

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insignificant, never the same the next moment and is subject to time. Everything is in a flux. Your body, senses, and mind are limited; knowledge, powers, pervasiveness and strength are limited. But the *Rishi* says that in spite of your body-mind-sense complex being limited, as you know it, and even though it becomes more limited as you come to know more about it, as you come to know about what is all there in the scheme of things, still, you are free from limitation.

When you come to see your position with a proper background, more objectively, the limitation only grows. It doesn't shrink. Confirming this, the *Rishi* says that in spite of this body-mind-sense complex being limited, you are free from limitation. You can only ask, "How?" He seems to have a vision because he doesn't contradict the limitations at all. But he negates your thinking, "Therefore I am limited." Instead of 'therefore' he says that in spite of the body-mind-sense complex being limited you are free from limitation. What choice do you have? There is nothing to contend with. You can only ask for further discussion about it like Śvetaketu did in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.

After twelve years of brilliant study when Śvetaketu returns home his father Uddālaka stuns him by asking, "Did you ask your teacher for that knowledge gaining which everything is known?" Śvetaketu replied "If my teacher had known he would have taught me. Is there such a thing?" His father tells him, "There is such a thing. What 'is', is one thing and that is you-*tattvamasi*."

The first statement what 'is', is one thing is upheld, is proven, by saying that there is a material cause out of which a lot things are made like from gold different ornaments are made. They have different names and forms and differently uses, but all of them are gold. A chain has no being without the gold. The weight of the chain is weight of gold. The quality, *dharma* is gold. All that is there is

only gold—before, now, later. Knowing that gold, everything made of gold is known.

Similarly all that is here is one conscious being whose knowledge alone is this world including your body-mind-sense complex. The being of this conscious being is not different from consciousness because consciousness is being. There is no being without being consciousness. Consciousness is the being. Being consciousness is called in the Upaniṣad *sat* and *cit*. Everything 'else' is *sat cit* so it is *sat cit ananta*. That consciousness is you and that is truth of not only your mind and senses, but also, every mind and sense organ and everything that is there—all have their being in this one conscious alone. That which is limitless, whole, that you are, *tvamasi*. Śvetaketu's father went on telling him this nine times from different standpoints "*tat satyam sa ātmā tattvamasi śvetaketo*", that is *satyam* that is the whole, the truth, and the self.

Uddālaka says that all that is here is one thing. That one thing was there before this entire *jagat* came. To say that there was a being before the entire *jagat* and that being created the *jagat* is one way of looking at it. But Śvetaketu's father presented the whole thing in a way that cannot be presented better. He said, *viditam aviditam idam sarvām*, all that you see and know—sun, moon, earth, stars, life forms, means and ends, causes and effects—and all that you don't know, *agre*, before it came in to being, it was. How can you say the *jagat* was there before it came in to being? Where was it? Where was space for space to be? Everything came together. How can it be? It can be.

Uddālaka said, "This is a Banyan tree. What do you think of it? It is a vast tree. Where did it come from? It came from the seed. Pick up a fruit and open it. What do you see?"

"I see seeds and seeds and seeds."

"Did this tree come from one of those seeds?"

"Yes."

“Open the seed. What do you see?”

“Nothing.”

“You can’t say ‘nothing’ because you said that the tree came from the seed. So it must be in the seed. Do you believe it was there?”

“It must be there.”

“How? You don’t see but it is there?”

“Yes, it must be there.”

Everything is the same in seed form. Everything is *sat cit ananta*; that limitless consciousness alone is that limitless knowledge. That limitless knowledge is this entire *jagat*, known and unknown, non-separate from consciousness. In the beginning there was word, knowledge, and the word was with God. In fact it is not that word was with God, the word was God. Word was not separate from that God.

We don’t say that God created this world; the world was and is God. In this form or that form all that is there is only God. It is not one God but only God. One has no meaning. It is a member of a set and subject to fraction. There is only God. If this is the truth how can you be normal without knowing this? When a doctor visits a residential institution all the fellows join together and call him abnormal! So we pass ourselves as normal thanks to good company. Until the *Rishi* comes and disturbs, everything is okay. Then only we begin to look at the whole thing. There is no way of anyone being normal without this confused self-identity. Understanding the facts about all that is here is pure pragmatism. You have to be alive to what is then you are real whatever reality it has got.

The discussion that we are going to have is to look into what is. What is, is *Īśvara*. What is, this God, we are going to see through words, by unfolding the words and understanding the words.

When one wants to recognize what is, whatever that exists, then it is imperative we understand the reality of what is. What is, is the question and the answer is only what

exists. Whatever exists is there. What is it that exists? Is it one thing? ‘Knowing which everything is known’ talks of one thing. When everything is known, then that everything is reduced to one thing without resorting to reductionism.

Just for the sake of understanding we can say that there are two orders of reality. In that example of gold and chain, if you say that what exists is gold, the various ornaments are counted in numbers. If you reckon the substance as one, the manifold forms need not be counted at all. If you don’t have a commitment to forms and you want to count only what is, then you end up counting one, one, one. What is there is a chain that is gold and the next one also is gold and so on. So one one one means gold gold gold. It is non-dually one. It is only one. Here your way of looking at it reduces the number of forms into one substance—what is one thing. This is not reductionism, reducing everything into one thing. What is, is one thing.

But what creates the necessity to look at all of them as one thing? The occasion is because there are so many forms. Here the chain itself has a count. If it has a human mind and thinks, “I am only a chain,” then it has a sense of limitation and inadequacy. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* it is said, “*tat satyam sa ātmā tattvamasī*.” The chain is addressed; in this world of ornaments the adjective golden is not an adjective. It is *satyam*, truth and it happens to be *ātma* of the chain. Therefore there is no difference between *satyam* and *ātma*. The chain, bangle and ring have a being and it is *satyam*, *ātma*. When you use the word ‘I’ it means *ātma*. Therefore *tat satyam tvamasī*. That *satyam* being non-separate from *ātma*, being *ātma*, what you refer by the word ‘I’, is *satyam*. “O chain you are the shining gold. So there is no question of you not being a ring or a bangle, because the ring and bangle are also you.” This is not a transcendental reality. It is just reality. Whatever you see is gold, so what do you transcend? Neither you can

transcend gold when you recognize chain nor when you recognize gold do you need to transcend chain. You don't need to transcend anything. When you say, "Touch wood," you don't transcend the chair.

The occasion for discussion is because of the confusion "I am a chain". That is abnormal. There is a confused self-identity. If there is confusion with reference to one object, that confusion may not cost you much. Sometimes it may. Suppose, having listened to Vedanta, you take a rattle snake as a rope, then it could become very costly! The mistakes are not very costly usually, so we get away with it—but it is costly.

Whatever is yourself, whether small or big, if you have confused self-identity it is a loss. This is the argument they give. When Vedanta says that you are the

whole, limitless,, the fellow wants to prove that he is small and not limitless. He spends all his time and his capacity to argue, all his logic and language to prove the point. The argument is, "If I am small, I don't want to be confused and deluded into thinking that I am not small." In fact you don't require any delusion because that you are small is very clear, and that you don't like it also clear. Even arguing with me is not to be small.

Suppose the self is mistaken for something else, then it is not an ordinary mistake. It is a loss. It is self-confusion. There is so much subjectivity that one can't be objective. If one has to be objective then one has to know the self. If the self is limitless and the only thing that exists, then the loss is infinite. If you are the limitless, then the loss is limitless to think that you are subject to limitation. Limitless cannot be separate from you. You plus limitless doesn't exist; limitless plus you doesn't exist. If it does, then there is limitless confusion with reference to the limitless. The confusion is limited because now and then you do forget your confusion. That is the time you are happy.

The whole issue is that the 'I' is limitless. If it is limitless then it has to be recognized as such, and then alone you are normal. Till then we accept each other and suffer each other. There is nothing else we can do so we need a support system. When the confusion is more, then the requirement of a support system becomes very important.

Tat satyam sa ātmā implies two things—what is and what we encounter. There is somebody who encounters, the subject, and something that is encountered, the object. Subject/object, knower/known is accepted as a reality. Not as a second reality but as a reality drawing its existence from the reality that we are talking about. The subject/object division doesn't really bring about a second thing. Object becomes whatever you know through various means of knowledge; objects recognized through the senses, and whatever we are able to infer based upon the data. What you believe to exist out there because of some basis is also an object. You the knower, and all the means of knowledge, and all the objects of knowledge—all three are the same one limitless alone. One plus three is equal to one.

What is, is only one. It is not a melting pot one. To say that the entire bunch of ornaments with different shapes and names and values are gold you don't need to melt them. If one has to melt them to make someone understand, then both will need to be melted. A lot of melting has to place. The concept is too crystallized. You don't need to do anything to understand. That all that is there is one is to understand this subject/object.

Subject is that which is centered on your body-mind-sense complex, the knower/known and the location, that is *adhyātma*. What you come across by the means of knowledge is *adhibhūta*. Light travelling at 180,000 and odd miles per second is *adhibhūta* reality. Related to that is the calculation of motion, time and distance that you study in different disciplines of

knowledge. But when you study all these you find that there is so much knowledge involved. There is a pair of eyes in me, in an owl, and a crow, to see. The owls' eye sees and the crow and your eyes also see. Wherever there are eyes they see. From its own standpoint it is *adhyātma*. An ophthalmologist, an optometrist and a retinologist deal with *adhyātma*, but what they study is not your eyes alone. Suppose in the creation every pair of eyes is made differently, then there will be no ophthalmology. But that is not so, which means there is total knowledge, an order. Eyes, ears and other senses imply a certain knowledge. You see different orders. When you recognize the total order it is not just *adhibhūta* alone. You see *adhidaiva* also. In terms of eyes, ears and any gland also, there is *adhidaiva*. You need to have a *devata* for a gland because it will come under *vaiśvānara*. Digestion is included in that. *aham vaiśvānaro bhūtvā prāṇinām dehamāśritaḥ prāṇāpānasamāyuktaḥ paccāmyannam cathurvoidam* (Bhagavadgita:15.14)

Having become the digestive fire obtaining in the bodies of living beings, endowed with *prāṇa* and *apāna*, I cook the four-fold food. This is the speciality that we see in the Vedic discussion of *Īśvara*. When you include this *adhidaiva* *adhibhūta* and *adhyātma* then you have *Īśvara* the Lord. Understanding of *adhidaiva* makes you feel connected.

The sense of alienation is loss of objectivity. To be objective is to be normal and to be normal means you have to be objective. To be objective is to include *adhidaiva*. Pragmatic, practical, objective, sane and normal are considered irreligious words. They have no connotation of religion. The words do not imply any god or religion. "I am a practical person. I don't believe in all this." I say you are not practical because you have not

included 'what is' in your understanding of what is. Unless, in your vision of reality, there is completeness, where is the question of practicality? You are living in your own subjective world, edited and abridged and that too confused. You are living in a hazy, foggy, vague, nothing world with no touch with reality. Any little change makes you go out of gear.

So they want to address the sense of alienation, anxiety and concern in psychology, as though they are practical people. It is true that they have to address it, but the basic reality is one whole. You need to understand *adhidaiva*, *adhibhūta* and *adhyātma*. If you recognize the *adhidaiva*, the total that includes *adhibhūta* and *adhyātma* then you can say that all that is here is *Īśvara*. Then you are practical. The benefit in that is that you are sane and there is no more alienation.

If everything is *Īśvara* then in how many words can we recognize this *Īśvara*? One word is enough—*Īśvara*. What is *Īśvara*? One more word, then one more word, one more word, and so you have a thousand words. This is called *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*. These words talk about the *svarūpa* as *satyam* the *ātma*. You are that whole. These are one set of revealing words. The *satya ātma* is all that is here, but how did it become all that is here intelligently? You have to say that this *satya ātma* is *sarvajña*. It has not become, but continues to be whatever it is. Gold did not become a chain; it continues to be gold. The chain is 'as though'. Similarly, the *adhibhūta*, *adhyātma*, your body-mind-sense complex and everything known and unknown, is the same whole. With all knowledge it manifests in this form. The unmanifest software, and manifest software, and 'as though' hardware is there. This is called *Īśvara*, the Lord.